

Some Essential Environmental Ingredients for Sex Offender Reintegration

Douglas P. Boer
University of Canberra

Abstract

Until the systematic work on the Good Lives Model (GLM) produced by Tony Ward, not a great deal of conceptual structure existed to provide sex offender treatment specialists with a theoretical underpinning for their work in helping offenders develop a better life as a way to prevent reoffending. However, the work of Ward and colleagues initially focussed more attention to making treatment more effective, with less attention devoted to applications of the GLM to the reintegration of sexual offenders into the community.

It is the contention of this article that expanding the focus of reintegration planning so that it includes the recognition of ingredients in the offender's environment that support reintegration will make that process more effective and hopefully thus help to reduce reoffending.

The basic environmental ingredients essential to effective community reintegration discussed in this article fit well with the general GLM model and apply to all sex offenders, including both adults and juveniles, and include the elements of support, occupation, accommodation, programs, and plans (SOAPP). It is acknowledged that these are but a subset of the protective factors relevant to effective community reintegration, but these are nevertheless some of the essential ingredients, in the author's view, for helping to ensure a "Good Life."

The sex offender literature is heavily focused on assessment and treatment. Until the systematic work on the Good Lives Model (GLM) developed by Tony Ward and colleagues, not a great deal of conceptual structure existed by which to provide sex offender treatment specialists with a theoretical underpinning for the work of helping offenders develop a better life as a way to prevent reoffending. Nevertheless, in my opinion, Ward and colleagues initially devoted less attention to applications of the GLM with respect to offender reintegration into community than they did to making treatment more effective in general.

That said, there have been some recent applications of the GLM with respect to issues related to reintegration, such as case management and community planning. However, it is my contention that expanding the focus of reintegration planning so that it includes the recognition of ingredients in the offender's environment that support reintegration will make that process more effective and hopefully thus help to reduce reoffending.

The basic ingredients essential to effective community reintegration discussed in this article fit well with the general GLM model and can be applied to all sex offenders, including both adults and juveniles.

■ The Guiding Framework of the Good Lives Model

The Good Lives Model (GLM) has been elucidated in a number of publications since it was originally proposed by Ward and Stewart in 2003. Numerous papers have since been published that explain the conceptual framework of the GLM (e.g., Ward & Stewart, 2003) and its application to sex offenders, the majority of which have focused on the rehabilitation of sexual offenders (e.g., Ward & Brown, 2004; Ward, Mann, & Gannon, 2007). Ward and

his colleagues have provided a number of excellent papers to inform those who treat sex offenders in terms of how to incorporate the GLM into sex offender programs (e.g., Ward & Gannon, 2006) and this focus remains a priority in even the most recent publications regarding the GLM (e.g., Willis, Yates, Gannon, & Ward, 2013). That said, the GLM has also been applied to case management (e.g., Purvis, Ward, & Willis, 2011) and goal planning (e.g., Ward & Fortune, 2013).

The present paper will not review the theoretical underpinnings of the GLM as that has been done well elsewhere by Ward and his colleagues (e.g., Ward & Fortune, 2013). Rather, this paper will focus on the last stage of intervention guided by the GLM as summarized by Ward (2010), namely the development of a "good lives plan" (GLP). A comprehensive GLP should take the information from the treatment program and formulate a plan that covers how the offender can best attain the various relevant primary and secondary "goods" central to the model. The reader is referred to any of the above publications by Ward and his colleagues for a detailed elucidation of what is meant by these terms. Basically, however, primary goods are basic human needs (e.g., life friendship, spirituality, pleasure, inner peace) that human beings try to attain via secondary goods which are essentially the practical means by which the primary goods are sought (e.g., attending a church to obtain the primary goods of friendship, inner peace, and presumably, spirituality). Of course, the great theoretical structure of the GLM has been simplified by the above analysis, and the reader is again referred to the above articles by Ward and his colleagues to become better informed. Ward (2010) noted that the development of a comprehensive GLP requires an evaluation of the environmental circumstances of each individual, as well as an analysis of their main primary goods. To make this theoretical structure work in practice, a case manager or sex offender treatment specialist will

have to contextualize these issues for the individual offender who may be living in the community (e.g., on probation or parole) or being considered for release. For example, if a sex offender is preparing for release from prison, the construction of an effective GLP will entail looking at probable environments for release in which the offender can safely pursue his (most sex offenders are male, so only male pronouns are used in this article, but all points are equally relevant to female sex offenders) goals. The initial steps in an environmental analysis require an overview of the resources and supports in the community that will help the offender attain his goals in a safe manner, in which the GLP basically contextualizes the offender's goals in a holistic fashion.

Of course, the GLM itself cannot account for all environmental variables, as the variables themselves will be as unique as each individual sex offender. However, there are two main areas of related offender literature that appear of relevance in providing additional guiding principles in the formation of the GLP – namely, that pointing to the contextual nature of risk and the literature describing protective factors.

■ The Contextual Nature of Risk

A number of theoretical papers over the years have noted that the environment around the sex offender is relevant to the risk that the offender poses to reoffend (e.g., Ward & Beech, 2006), and that any release planning exercise should examine the nature of the release environment when formulating release or treatment plans (e.g., Ward & Gannon, 2006). Indeed, there is no doubt from a theoretical point of view that risk is context-dependent. Nevertheless, the research literature has been less forthcoming in providing evidence that this common-sense claim is valid as most risk assessment strategies eschew any reference to the offender's environment and focus on client risk issues only (e.g., Static-99; Hanson & Thornton 1999), or those that are contained within the client himself.

However, it is a central position of this paper that the risk *context* is as important as the risks inherent to the offender when an overall risk level is being assessed, or when a risk management plan is being formulated. In my view, the "risk context" is composed of the environmental variables that are "risk relevant," or those variables that affect and influence the offender's risk in some manner. For example, Boer, McVilly, and Lambrick (2007) discussed the importance of analyzing environmental factors when assessing the risk of sex offenders with an intellectual disability, and although that paper was a theoretical exercise there is support for the importance of environmental analysis of risk. For example, Lofthouse and colleagues (2013) examined the predictive validity of the *Assessment of Risk and Manageability for Individuals with Developmental and Intellectual Limitations who Offend Sexually* (ARMIDILLO-S; Boer et al., 2012). These authors found that the environmental items of the instrument had almost the same level of predictive validity

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ty as the offender items (AUCs of 0.79, $p=0.003$ and 0.85, $p<0.001$ respectively)¹.

While the offender variables in the ARMIDILO-S are well-known (e.g., supervision compliance, sexual deviance, impulsivity, substance abuse), the environmental items were relatively new to offender risk evaluation (e.g., attitude of staff towards the client, communication among support persons, client knowledge by support persons, consistency of supervision and intervention, changes in social relationships, situational/accommodation changes, changes in victim access, and unique considerations that could include access to drugs or alcohol). While Boer and colleagues (2012) limited the literature review supporting the use of the ARMIDILO-S for offenders with developmental and intellectual limitations, and the Lofthouse et al. (2013) study was conducted only with sex offenders with intellectual disabilities, it is arguable that all of the environmental issues in the ARMIDILO-S are also relevant to risk for all sex offenders (and probably other client groups as well, with the usual empirical questions being applied and satisfied).

The implications of the Lofthouse study (2013) are clear for sex offenders with intellectual limitations, if not, by extrapolation, to all offenders and other groups with problematic or challenging behavior; the risk-relevant environmental variables, such as those found in the ARMIDILO-S, are evidence that the risk context is critical in ascertaining the risk for reoffending by the client.

■ A Brief Discussion of Protective Factors

The SAPROF (*Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for Violence Risk*; de Vogel, de Ruiter, Bouman, & de Vries Robbé, 2009), the ARMIDILO-S (Boer et al., 2012), and other publications (mostly regarding juvenile offenders; e.g., Bremer, 1998) provide a structured assessment format that includes both client-specific and environmental issues that are seen as protective factors. Some of this literature is sex-offender specific (e.g., Bremer, 1998; Boer et al., 2012), while other assessment tools focus on violence in general but likely are applicable to sex offenders as well, such as the *Short-Term Assessment of Risk and Treatability* (START; Webster, Martin, Brink, Nicholls, & Middleton, 2004) and the SAPROF (de Vogel et al., 2009). Although not designed for sexual offenders, many of the factors in both the START and the SAPROF seem generically applicable to all sorts of offenders, including sexual offenders. Indeed, research has shown that the SAPROF, although initially designed for use with non-sexual violent offenders, also works well with sexual offenders (e.g., Yoon, Spehr, & Briken, 2011). However, other authors (e.g., Boer et al., 2012) have focused on specific populations with their risk and protective factor assessment instruments.

The question of what exactly constitutes a protective factor warrants some attention. The authors of the SAPROF (de Vogel et al., 2009) provided an interesting discussion regarding the theoretical issues related to the nature of risk and protective factors that the authors of the START did not broach, such as the theoretical mechanisms by which protective factors may work to decrease current risk. However, these issues were not resolved by de Vogel and colleagues and the literature has not yet reached a consensus as to the nature and definition of a protective factor, or an understanding of the underlying mechanism by which protective factors work to decrease risk. The question of whether protective factors serve as a buffer against or play a mediation role in mitigating risk (see Fitzpatrick, 1997 for a longer discussion) raises interesting and important theoretical issues. However, the resolution of such questions is possibly unrelated to the question of whether client or environmental factors better promote increased risk management, and which, therefore, functionally serves as a protective factor. It is perhaps noteworthy that studies examining protective factors among sexual offenders have not always found the expected effect of factors purported to be protective (e.g., Spice, Viljoen, Litzman, Scalora, & Ullman, 2013).

In the present paper, a client or environmental factor is viewed as protective when the *presence* of such a factor could or does result in decreased risk. However, although it is possible that some protective factors are the simple opposites of certain risk factors, the relationship between even similar factors is usually more complex. For example, if an offender does not have a substance abuse problem (and never had one), his risk is clearly not increased due to substance use – but is this *lack* of a problem equal to the action of a protective factor? It adds little for us to assume that *not* having a problem decreases risk, and especially as the offending behavior occurred in the absence of that particular risk issue in the first place!

Illustrating a different kind of relationship, although a history of sexual deviance is a well-acknowledged risk factor the completion of sex offender treatment that includes learning skills by which to manage sexually deviant urges *is* protective (assuming such treatment is effective for the individual in question). Nevertheless, following such treatment, the history or presence of deviance does not go away nor do learned skills by which to manage deviant urges eliminate deviance entirely or necessarily actively decrease risk – yet, these new skills are protective. However, it is the client's decision to use these skills in a situation that could otherwise result in a new offense that is actually protective, in which the client's use of skills validates the nature of those skills as protective.

In action, it seems reasonable to assume that protective factors either primarily mediate *between* client risk factors and offending behavior (thus interrupting the otherwise linked relationship between risk and harmful behavior), or they buffer the client from the effects of client or environmental risk factors and, in either case, either decrease or eliminate the potential for offending behavior (de Vogel et al.,

2009). In the case of either mechanism of action, the relative absence of a protective factor should result in an increased risk for the offending behavior to occur, as nothing then serves to intervene between risk and actual harmful behavior.

Of course, it is up to the assessor to ensure that the presence or absence of a protective (or risk) factor is accurately evaluated. Indeed, the relevance of any such factor to risk can be determined only when evidence is available regarding the presence or absence of a risk or protective factor in the life of each individual. That is, there must be evidence that a risk or protective factor exists. Furthermore, the importance of any one factor in the individual case will depend on its risk-relevance in each case.

■ The Intertwined Effects of Risk and Protective Factors

In reality, offense risk is a complex outcome of intertwined and interactive client and environmental variables. For example, low levels of intelligence, described by authors such as de Vogel et al. (2009) as increasing risk for reoffending, may result in greater levels of environmental support in an individual case, thereby serving to actually mitigate any risk that an intellectual disability for may have otherwise created for that particular individual. A similar individual without a similar level of support may have a much higher level of risk due to the lack of such support. Of course, the relationship between low levels of intelligence and sexual (and non-sexual violent) offending is a complex and misunderstood, and certainly not a straightforward, issue as noted by Lindsay (2009) in a discussion well beyond the scope of the present paper.

Another issue that may complicate matters is that all (to my knowledge) risk assessment measures for adult offenders (e.g., the START, ARMIDILO-S) that include both risk *and* protective factors, also incorporate both client and environmental factors in the same instrument. Indeed, the START puts all of the items, including both client and environmental factors, into one lengthy list and the assessor must rate each item in terms of the risk and protective strength level it presents for the client. The SAPROF (which includes only protective factors, and is not a risk assessment instrument per se) classifies variables into internal, motivational, and external (environmental) factors, in which items are evaluated only in terms of the degree or level of protection that each item provides to the client. However, the ARMIDILO-S provides a hybrid of both approaches: environmental (or external) factors are itemized in a category separate from client factors (like the SAPROF), but both environmental and client factors are scored from a risk and a protective strengths perspective (like the START).

■ Consideration of Contextual and Protective Factors in the Development of a Good Lives Plan (GLP)

As noted earlier, a comprehensive GLP will cover how an offender can best attain various relevant primary goods by means of secondary “goods” without harming self or others in the process. In addition, also previously described, Ward (2010)

¹ An AUC, or area under the curve, value of .71 and above is considered to have moderate predictive validity, and .80 and above to be moderate to strong.

proposed that the development of a comprehensive GLP requires an evaluation of the individual's environmental circumstances, as well as an analysis of his main primary goods. Basically, a comprehensive GLP will contextualize the primary and secondary goods issues for each individual offender who may be living in the community or being considered for release, so that primary goods may be pursued and obtained in the lowest risk and most supportive environment available. For example, if an adjudicated sex offender is being released to the community, a comprehensive GLP will assess risk-relevant aspects (both risk and protective) of possible environments in which the offender may live so that he can safely pursue his goals.

The initial steps in an environmental analysis thus require an overview of available community resources and supports that can help the offender attain his goals in a safe manner, as well as an analysis of risk issues present in that setting. However, although the GLP contextualizes the offender's goals by considering them in the community setting, it cannot account for all possible risk-relevant environmental variables, as these variables will themselves be as unique as each individual sex offender and it is safe to say that not all environmental factors are risk-relevant in every case. That said, the protective factor literature does provide a great deal of guidance in terms of what factors are risk-relevant.

In summary, risk is context specific in which aspects of the environmental context may be risk-relevant, possibly serving as either risk or protective factors. Some of the critical protective environmental issues are described in the next section of this paper.

■ Essential Ingredients: Support, Occupation, Accommodation, Programs, and Plans (SOAPP)

While risk factors are perhaps most commonly analysed when considering release of a sexual offender into the community setting (for example, presence of elementary schools in the case of a predatory pedophile), possible protective factors should also be as assiduously assessed in order to help formulate a GLP. In my view, the majority of environmental factors of a protective nature fall into five categories: support, occupation, accommodation, programs, and plans (SOAPP).

There is a literature supporting each of these areas in terms of protective factors, but it is worth noting that it would be naïve to suggest that any of these may not also be potentially risk-enhancing, rather than risk-reducing. For example, if an offender's main source of social support is a group of fellow criminals who offer him accommodation and a job selling drugs, then his risk for criminality has not been reduced. Similarly, a church group can offer an offender support, but if that well-meaning group provides access to children and the offender is a pedophile, the support may also serve to increase risk by providing the offender with access to children that he might not otherwise have. Obviously, the risk-relevance of each SOAPP area must be evaluated to ensure it is functionally protective, rather

than risk enhancing, in the community in which the offender intends to live or within which the offender is already living.

As noted in the Sexual Violence Risk-20 instrument (SVR-20; Boer, Hart, Kropp, & Webster, 1997), "realistic plans" involve the offender's "explicit, stable and reasonable" stated intentions (i.e., plans) regarding how he intends to live in the community in regard to "(supportive) relationships, employment, place of residence (accommodation), health care, and compliance with supervision conditions (e.g., community-based programs)" (p. 79). Of course, "plans" are offender generated and client-based rather than environmentally-based. Nevertheless, it is how the offender develops plans to engage with his current or proposed community that is the focus in this article or, basically, environmental planning as formulated by the offender.

As briefly discussed above, although SOAPP factors are described below as positive and protective, we can nonetheless visualize "risky" variants of each factor. For example, as described, if an offender's social support is an antisocial group who provide him with accommodation as long as he sells drugs for them, then risk for criminality has not been decreased. In fact, it has been increased. Again, risk and protective factors are context dependent.

1. Social support

Social support is incorporated into the ARMIDILO-S, SAPROF, and START as an important protective factor, whether as a stand-alone item (in the START, for example) or as an over-arching construct present in a number of related items. The SAPROF, for instance, includes several external factors that are related to social support, namely social networks, intimate relationships, and professional care. Alternatively, the ARMIDILO-S reviews various aspects of support persons who look after the client (usually staff or parents), including communication between support persons, the attitude of support persons toward the client, the knowledge of support persons regarding the issues of individual clients, and the consistency of supervision and intervention provided by support persons.

Borowsky, Hogan, and Ireland (1997) noted that supportive friendships and connections with adults in school, church, and police agencies are protective factors for adolescents who have been sexually aggressive. However, the authors of the START and ARMIDILO-S noted that a relationship may serve either a risk increasing or risk decreasing (protective) function, depending on the nature and quality of the relationship. For instance, as described above, attending a church or an educational center may serve a risk increasing or a decreasing function depending on how attendance is managed by the offender, in collaboration with the church or educational center.

2. Occupation

A person's occupation is anything he or she does that is experienced as a productive use of their time, whether it is an actual job or some sort of activity that increases that person's self-esteem and is viewed by others as useful and unrelated to criminality. Volunteer work, leisure activities (e.g.,

sports), paid work – all of these activities occupy a person's time and are generally contraindicative of offending. Of course, if a person is a pedophile and seeks work in a child-care center, the environmental risk is obvious. As is always the case, the nature and quality of the occupational setting needs to be assessed.

Indeed, many of the structured professional guidelines describe a poor history of employment as a risk issue (e.g., Boer et al., 1997). For instance, the SAPROF includes work and leisure activities as "motivational (protective) factors," and the START describes occupational issues serving either a risk increasing or protective function. Conversely, the ARMIDILO-S includes occupational issues as a "unique consideration" rather than a stand-alone item, but again recognizes occupational issues serving either a risk increasing or protective function.

3. Accommodation

There is a relatively large literature on the importance of accommodation as a protective environmental factor. For example, Baldry (2005) found that having housing arranged prior to release reduced recidivism. O'Leary (2013) similarly found evidence relating stable accommodation to reductions in recidivism, although also raised some interesting questions about how accommodation acts to reduce risk. The nature of causal mechanisms aside, the risk reducing effect of housing, or accommodation, is significantly determined by the geographical setting, nature, and quality of the housing. If an offender with a drug habit is being released from prison to live in an area frequented by other drug users and sellers, for instance, then the protective nature of his accommodation is clearly compromised.

The SVR-20 notes that realistic planning regarding "place of residence" (i.e., accommodation) is important. However, although accommodation itself is not treated as a risk or protective factor in either the SVR-20 or the START, in the SAPROF "living circumstances" is viewed as a protective factor. In the ARMIDILO-S, a change in accommodation (i.e., "situational changes") is considered to be an acute (or possible rapidly changing) environmental factor, although may also be thought of as a stable environmental "unique consideration". In the ARMIDILO-S, accommodation is also linked to "victim access," as an acute environmental factor, in which changes in accommodation may provide increased access to victims without any action on the offender's part to gain such increased access.

4. Programs

Andrews and Bonta (2010) have for over two decades promulgated the idea that effective offender rehabilitation is premised on the basis of "risk, need, and responsivity." Indeed, these authors provide convincing proof that effective correctional programs, based upon the principles of risk, need, and responsivity, reduce recidivism for a variety of offenders, sex offenders included. Oddly, however, effective treatment and/or case management programs are not included as protective factors in any of the instruments described in this paper. The pro-

vision of effective programs prior to release or following release in the community may be construed as one form of support, but effective programs clearly offer more than pro-social support. Such programs also provide treatment, information, structure, guidance, and in many cases, monitoring and/or supervision, as well as access to needed services and a helping hand and helping relationships when needed.

5. Plans

Realistic planning (or lack thereof) has been espoused in a number of instruments as either a risk issue (e.g., the SVR-20, which describes poor and unrealistic planning) or as a protective feature (the START, for example, describes planning that is feasible and realistic, and the SAPROF describes appropriate life goals). Similarly, Andrews and Bonta (2010) noted that offenders who fail to create and implement realistic and feasible plans are more likely to reoffend upon release.

There is some evidence supporting this idea. For example, Willis (2010) examined a number of variables in assessing the role of pre-release planning in reducing sexual offender recidivism. She found that offenders who devised feasible plans with regard to post-release accommodation, employment, and pro-social support reoffended at a lower rate than those offenders who did not develop feasible plans. Although the exact nature of these variables was not defined, and offender planning was not necessarily related to reduced recidivism for offenders treated in community-based settings, these data provide tentative support for the contention that the development of realistic and strong plans is an essential ingredient in effective and safe community reintegration and a key element in the SOAPP approach to reintegration.

■ Summary

Over the years, various legal, research, and treatment forums have asserted that acceptable and effective release planning is contingent on meeting the majority of issues identified in instruments such as the SVR-20 as examples of future planning. These include having supportive relationships (including socially supportive pro-social relationships such as friendships, family relationships, intimate partners, therapists, probation officers, caregivers, etc.), an acceptable risk-reducing occupation (paying jobs, educational placements, work experience placements, school attendance, sports, leisure activities, etc.), an acceptable place of residence or accommodation that is risk-reducing, and/or does not increase risk, enrolment in or completion of a risk-relevant treatment or correctional program, and feasible life plans (how the offender plans to engage with the community in terms of support, occupation, accommodation, and programs).

Perhaps it is self-evident to most readers, but it is nevertheless important to note that each aspect of the SOAPP not only addresses individual risk and protective-relevant issues, but also overlaps with every other aspect of the SOAPP as these issues are not mutually exclusive. For example, a good occupational setting provides social support, and a

pro-socially supportive person or organization will likely help an offender find an occupation and possibly provide or help find accommodation. Support persons, such as social workers, help offenders locate risk-reducing occupational environments and appropriate accommodation, prescribe relevant programs, and review the offender's plans. In turn, realistic and feasible plans are necessarily malleable and the offender can make his plan more and more feasible with regard to potential occupational choices, places to live, supportive organizations, and programs that are currently relevant.

As noted earlier in this paper, the initial steps in the environmental analysis that must be completed to construct an effective Good Life Plan (GLP) require a review and understanding of the resources and supports in the community that will help the offender attain his goals in a safe manner. Indeed, it is proposed here that the majority of environmental issues that are or might be protective in nature are addressed by a number of currently available structured professional guidelines for the assessment of risk, such as the SVR-20, the SAPROF for the assessment of protective factors, and for the assessment of risk and protective issues, the START and the ARMIDILLO-S. Together, the elements assessed by these and other similar instruments can be subsumed under the SOAPP acronym (Support, Occupation, Accommodation, Programs, and Plans). Meeting and satisfying the SOAPP criteria – having realistic, risk-reducing plans that provide for support, occupation, accommodation, and programs – provides a strong foundation for the formulation of an effective GLP, and thus the safe pursuit of the many primary goods that help to define a Good Life.

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■ Author Contact Information

Douglas P. Boer

Professor of Clinical Psychology
Centre for Applied Psychology, Faculty of Health,
University of Canberra ACT 2601
Email: Douglas.Boer@canberra.edu.au